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ATG Interviews Eckart Scheffler

Walter de Gruyter <easchef@aol.com>

by Katina Strauch (Editor, *Against the Grain*) <kstrauch@comcast.net>

ATG: *Gosh! We have just learned that you will be retiring from de Gruyter in June! I believe you are going to be a consultant for a period of time and that Patrick Alexander, Publishing Director in New York is taking over? Tell us more specifics. We will miss you!*

De Gruyter's plans to hire a North American Publishing Director became reality when Patrick Alexander came aboard in January 2005. My pending retirement and Patrick's experience in running the operation of Brill Academic Publishers in Boston brought on the decision for Patrick to also take over management of de Gruyter's New York operation. As you mentioned I continue to be available as a consultant to assure a smooth transition.

ATG: *Tell us about de Gruyter and your vision for the company. You have done so much! After establishing de Gruyter's U.S. branch in 1971 with 2 people, you acquired Mouton Publishers, Aldine Publishing Company, American Universities and Colleges. How did this all happen? What was your vision for the company?*

We started in 1971 as a German publisher eager to expand into the U.S. market. At the same time it became clear that publishing more and more of our publications in the English language was an absolute necessity and the quickest way to grow was through acquisition. This allowed us to set up a U.S. marketing and sales operation and, in addition, to establish our own distribution company to combine effective sales of our large list of imported titles together with U.S. publications for the course market.

ATG: *In 2004 you handled all aspects of the successful sale of the Aldine imprint to Transaction Publishers, the sale of American Universities and Colleges to Greenwood Press, and the outsourcing of distribution to Books International. What does this mean? Is de Gruyter making plans for taking another direction in publishing?*

I see the future of de Gruyter in the concentration and expansion in areas which have been de Gruyter's strengths in the past: As one of the leading scholarly publishers in the fields of Religion, Classical Studies, Language, Literature and Philosophy, de Gruyter will further strengthen their existing list through the acquisition of books and journals with a very

strong emphasis on titles for the international market. The divestiture of the Aldine social and behavioral science list was the first step in that direction, followed by the sale of AU&C, the leading US directory of 4-year schools. The division Mouton de Gruyter, a publisher concentrating on Linguistics and Language Sciences for the world market, and complementing de Gruyter's Language and Literature program at the same time, is an important indicator for the future of de Gruyter. Specialization and publishing for the international market, rather than being just an American or German publisher, is my vision for de Gruyter's future.

ATG: *De Gruyter has maintained its independence as a publishing company. Will this continue or is an acquisition in the wings?*

De Gruyter has fiercely defended its independence, which is rather difficult in times of restricted library budgets and strong foreign currencies. Many scholarly publishers have disappeared and their names have been forgotten. Existing publishers have more or less given up publishing scholarly monographs, because of a shrinking market resulting in high prices. De Gruyter will continue to be an independent publisher.

ATG: *You have been at the company 33 years. What do you see as the big changes that you have witnessed? Do you care to make predictions for the next few years?*

The biggest changes since the 1970s are in the technology area. I remember the first Fax machine taking 5 minutes to transmit one page! Or a portable phone setup weighing 22 pounds, costing \$1,800! The list is endless. Just think about electronic publishing. Or the last day your email was down!

My predictions for the years to come? I give up. For new technology, just double everything that happened over the last 30 years. Make it half the size, 10% of today's price and 3 times as powerful!

Concerning publishing: The conventional book is here to stay, while electronic media will make further inroads and become a major part and revenue source of everyday publishing. A conventional book, whether it is a beautiful cloth-bound book, a paperback with its slick coated cover, or maybe even a leather-bound

volume with its distinctive smell, speaks to our senses and will never be entirely replaced by a computer screen. While a reference work or dictionary or handbook can become more accessible and more useful through electronic dissemination, the book itself, as you can open and pile them wherever needed, will always have a presence, and like the Irish man said, after he shut off the light: "Do you need light to turn the page?"

ATG: *How many books, journals, electronic materials does de Gruyter publish? How many do they plan to publish in the future?*

Annually, de Gruyter publishes more than 250 new books, over 60 academic journals, and numerous titles in various electronic media. These numbers will climb steadily, also with additional titles being acquired through Patrick's work as Publishing Director in New York.


ATG: *I can't resist asking. How many years have you been coming to the Charleston Conference? Will you come back in November 2005?*

I have been attending the Charleston Conference for at least 15 years; I remember the modest beginnings, just look at it now! CC is the place to be in November, just make sure not to put the date too close to the Frankfurt Bookfair.

ATG: *Tell us what you plan to do in your spare time. Family? Reading? Hobbies? Other?*


What spare time? It will take me a few months just to take care of things I put aside for retirement. Nevertheless I have many hobbies, on the top of the list is traveling with my family, especially driving through Europe, skiing, boating, collecting precious metal (the kind on wheels) and, yes, maybe I can even find the time to read a book, I certainly have acquired a few of them over the years. But since it does not just take time to do things, I might become a U.S. consultant for European publishers, which will allow me to stay in touch with my colleagues and friends on both sides of the Atlantic. I can be reached at (914) 827-7404 (email: easchef@aol.com)

ATG: *Good luck! See you soon, we hope.*

Thank you, and don't count me out! 

And They Were There from page 79

Emmert described an Alibris program that permits Interlibrary Loan departments to purchase books from Alibris through OCLC, just as they pursue any ILL request. Several libraries have experimented with this concept and have reported it in the literature. These have shown that books purchased in this way tend to circulate more than four times and that they pay for themselves if they circulate three times. Libraries set up guidelines and have varying policies and procedures. In general, they consider whether there is a nearby free lender, whether the item is too new to borrow and whether they

have or expect multiple requests for the same item. These books tend to cover interdisciplinary areas. Because they have been requested, bibliographers know they are needed and are comfortable with unreviewed purchases. Some issues raised by attendees included the fact that Alibris supplies books in "very good" condition when libraries may not need such good condition, possible duplication with acquisitions purchases and the fact that library patrons sometimes request materials that they don't really want. 

Watch for the remaining three reports from the Charleston Conference in the June issue of *Against the Grain*! The entire Charleston Conference Proceedings will be published by Greenwood/Libraries Unlimited later this year: